

Garrard County ATC Principal Jim Alford began career using CTE skills and advanced during 33 years of service



In a career that began as a student and ended as principal in the same facility, James (Jim) Alford feels a great sense of pride as he steps into retirement with 33 years of service. It's a story that punctuates the value of career and technical education in today's society.

Photo (l to r): OCTE deputy executive director Mike Kindred, Alford and executive director John Marks. Alford was recognized for his years of service at the KY Tech Principals' meeting during the KACTE summer conference.

Alford began by learning his carpentry skills at the Garrard County Extension Center. From that humble beginning, he was counseled to attend a postsecondary institution, graduated from college, taught in an out-of-county school in the state's vocational system, continued his education, moved back to his community to teach, and in due course became principal of KY Tech-Garrard County. It's a career that blends technical education and skills training at both the secondary and postsecondary levels with his determination to complete academic degrees. It's also proof positive that the system works because Alford is a successful and proud product of career and technical education.

Alford:

“My vocational technical career actually began in Garrard County when I was a junior in high school in 1971. I followed several of my friends to the center - just as students still do today from our feeder schools.

“I originally signed up for an automotive class, but when we toured the school, something happened. As I stepped into the carpentry shop, the smell of wood throughout the room was all it took for an instant career change. I was hooked.”

***Photo by Photographer
Tim Thornberry***



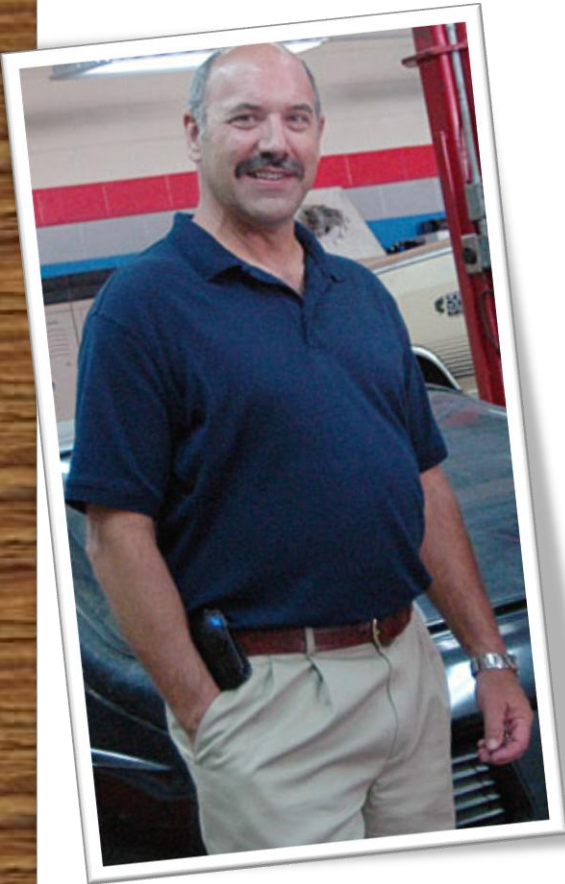
Alford enrolled in the carpentry program and was a student under instructor Palmer Burke as both a junior and senior. “Mr. Burke was probably as good of a carpentry and cabinet instructor in the system at that time,” says Alford.

During his senior year in high school, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) professor Dr. Bob Ogle visited Mr. Burke’s class to promote going to college – something that many professors still do today by visiting area technology centers across the Commonwealth. Mr. Burke and Dr. Ogle encouraged him to attend ECU and to enroll in the vocational/industrial education program to become a carpentry instructor. According to Alford, a lot of teachers and principals in the system today really got their start with Dr. Bob Ogle’s visits.

“After high school, most all of my friends were going to Boyle County to work in factories for what many considered big money then,” said Alford. “My Dad worked in a factory and I wasn’t as excited as some of them, so I decided to take the college route.”



When he graduated from high school, Alford received a certificate from Garrard showing his hours in the carpentry program. The certificate is something he has cherished since it was presented to him. In fact, it meant so much that it has always had a place of honor in his office – along with his framed degrees.



In the fall of 1973, Alford officially began his college career at ECU. He majored in industrial/vocational education with a specialization in woods. “I had great instructors at ECU who strengthened my skills and prepared me to teach,” said Alford. “But, I have always given credit to Mr. Burke for teaching me the carpentry and cabinet making trade while in high school. I have never stopped using those skills.”

Upon completing his course work, Alford went back to Garrard County to do his student teaching. During that time, Clark County Vocational School principal Larry Sutton visited Garrard looking for a carpentry instructor. He took the time to watch Alford teach a lesson, observe his interaction with students, and inform him of the job.

Alford graduated with his Bachelor of Science degree in the summer of 1977. Within the month of July, he graduated with a 10 year teaching certificate, moved to Lexington, got married, interviewed for and was hired as the new Clark County Vocational School carpentry instructor and prepared to begin his new career as a teacher. Alford replaced Wayne Spencer who took over as principal of the Breckinridge County Area Vocational Education Center (AVEC).

“My starting salary was \$786 a month,” said Alford. “Salaries are tough now, but we have really come a long way since that time.”

During the 12 years he taught at Clark County, there were several principals who were at the school’s helm including Larry Sutton, Ed Davis, Betty Hughes, Delmus Murrell, Ron Baugh, Louie Reed and Bill Lockhart.

“Clark County must have been a stepping stone for advancement because they would come in, stay a year or two and move up,” said Alford. “Under that many administrative changes, it was both an adjustment and learning experience. I was able to see all types of different leadership styles. From that perspective, it was extremely valuable because I learned something from each administrator.”

When Mr. Burke (Alford's former carpentry instructor) announced his retirement in the summer of 1989, Alford applied for, was hired, and transferred to Garrard County as the new carpentry instructor.

"Leaving the Clark County position after 12 years was difficult – almost as tough as it is to retire now," said Alford. "My family was settled, we had just built a new home within walking distance of the school, and the center had a good staff, secretary, and custodian. Mr. Bill Lockhart was a great principal."

Once the decision was made, Alford relocated his family back to Lincoln County where both he and his wife Laurie grew up. Alford moved his wife and their three daughters into a 900 square foot farm house with one bathroom and well water – a far stretch from the new 2,600 square foot, 3 bath home they left behind. According to Alford, "None of the girls ever complained."

Alford settled into his new environment with a great sense of pride. He knew from personal experience that Mr. Burke had a great carpentry program and felt a personal responsibility to keep the program operating at that high level. For the next 6 years, Alford was focused on doing a great job in the classroom.



Alford taught carpentry at Garrard County under Principal Jim Spurlin. In the summer of 1995, Mr. Spurlin took a new job as the Garrard County Transportation Director. The time was right for Alford to move up the ladder into a leadership position – something that he had long planned for while going to college. He already had his bachelor of science, teaching certificate and 18 years of experience in the classroom. During those years, he also completed a master’s degree and the vocational administration requirement. He had the complete resume. So, Alford decided to use his advanced degrees to apply for the Garrard County Area Vocational Education Center principal’s position. He succeeded and began his new career as principal for the upcoming 1995-96 school year.

“It took me several years to get over the shock of leaving the classroom. I always enjoyed teaching and making a difference in counseling students, just as those before me did to help me.” said Alford. “There was a tremendous difference in moving from the classroom to the principal’s office and at that time, the 5 per-cent raise above a teacher’s salary made me wonder if I’d made the right choice. Over the years, it became clear to me that everything worked out. I’m thankful for all the positive experiences and opportunities that career and technical education provided and it was because I enrolled in a carpentry class during high school.

According to Alford, being an area technology center principal “is one of the most rewarding and challenging jobs anyone could have. When the bell rings each morning, you are there making a difference along with the secretary, custodian and instructors. It’s a team effort.”



KY Tech-Garrard Co. faculty and staff - front row, l to r: Greg Taylor, design & engineering technology; Page Smith, health sciences; Robin Noe, secretary; Jimmy Denny, custodian; and Mike Armstrong, automotive technology. Back row (l to r): Charles Oakley, carpentry; Alford, and Tim Pinson, welding.

Robin Noe
Administrative Secretary:

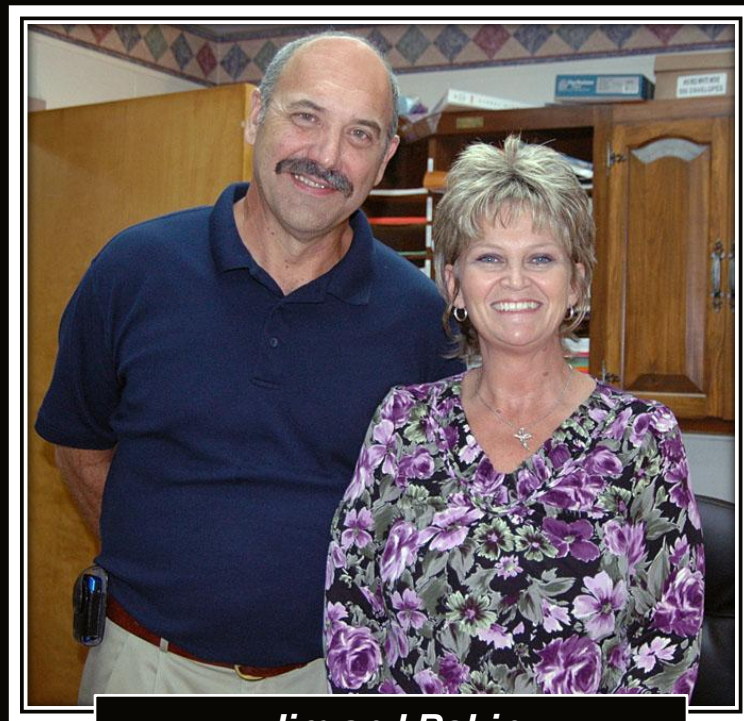
“I have worked with Jim Alford for 18 years - 15 of those years he served as the principal of our center. I have the utmost respect for him as an individual and educator. He was a great boss and a good friend. Not many people can call their boss a friend.

“He always put the education of our students first. He shared his enthusiasm for the value of education and contributed in helping many of them realize their potential.

“His leadership and devotion to our school, the staff, the students, and the community helped to develop our center into a stronger organization. He will be greatly missed. He has been a special friend to many.

“I will miss the fun we had (at his expense) over the years through the many sayings and quotes he became noted for among the staff.

“For his dedication, I would like to thank him and offer my greatest appreciation to him for making a fundamental difference in all our lives. I also want to extend my personal gratitude for the devoted service and my best wishes for an enjoyable retirement.”



Jim and Robin

Carpentry

Inside of Oakley's classroom, wood from one of his old barns covers the walls to provide an old time look. Students can also see a variety of antique tools antique that decorate the walls. This provides some great discussions in class.

Charles Oakley Carpentry:

"I am starting my ninth year as the carpentry instructor at our school. Coming into the KY Tech system with a leader like Jim Alford has been a blessing to me and my program. Over the years, I have picked Jim's brain many times about teaching strategies and he never failed to help me out. Having a principal who was a carpentry instructor has been valuable.

"We have a very capable man in David Horseman to fill Jim's work boots. It's been a ball working with him."





***Tim Pinson
Welding:***

“Jim has been a great guy to work with over the past several years. I appreciate his steady hand and sense of responsibility to his faculty, staff and students.

“The Ky. Tech system has been very fortunate to have Jim Alford serve as one of our leaders.

He truly understands what technical education is really all about and worked very hard to make sure the needs of all students were met. I wish him the very best.”

Armstrong and Alford



**Mike Armstrong
Automotive Technology:**

“I have known Jim for approximately 30 years and like everyone in this school, I have a great deal of respect for him. He has a big heart.

“Jim’s a guy that makes teachers feel that they are in charge of their students and in control of their classrooms. But, we all know that he is our leader. He has always set the parameters and allowed his teachers to manage their respective programs.”

**Greg Taylor
Design & Engineering Technology:**

“I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to know and work for Jim Alford. I could never repay him for all of the help and support he has given me throughout the years. He is highly respected by not only our staff and students, but everyone that knows him within our education system. Jim was a great principal, but is even a greater friend. I wish him the very best in his retirement.”



Alford and Taylor



Page Smith
Health Sciences:

“Mr. Alford has been the principal at Garrard County since I started in 1999. It has been a privilege to work for him during these past 11 years. Anytime I told someone where I worked, it was always met with ‘you are so lucky. Mr. Alford is such a nice man.’ I agree.

“He has always treated staff and students with respect and kindness while working hard to ensure that our school was the best it could be. While I hope Mr. Alford thoroughly enjoys his retirement, he will certainly be missed.”

Jimmy Denny
Custodian:

“Jim has been a good principal and I consider him a friend. He deserves this well-earned retirement.”



Question and answer session with Jim Alford

1. What is your greatest accomplishment?

“Answering this question is difficult because in my opinion, career and family meld together. Actually, raising my family has been my greatest accomplishment. I taught mostly male students for 15 years, but went home to my wife and three girls for the past 33 years.

“There are some great teachers and administrators out there who do not have children. To me, having children gives you a different perspective in understanding students and working in the education system.”

2. How do you think people will remember you?

“I believe people will remember me as someone who was part of a team that provided a safe environment in the classroom, viable instruction, and as a principal who worked hard to make a difference in the lives of students.

“In my opinion, there are not many students who come to an ATC that are not preceded by someone in their family. It could have been a brother, sister, mother or father who took some kind of technical education or skills training. Over the years, we see those family members in our schools. There are a lot of people working today who have had some kind of start in our system.

“Hopefully I have maintained that standard and helped provide opportunities for everyone who walked into our school.”

Question and answer session with Jim Alford

3. What do you consider to be the most important issue(s) facing vocational-technical education today?

“I see two ways to look at issues facing career and technical education – one is from the area technology center standpoint and the other is from a central office perspective.

“Many would agree that the biggest issue facing the Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) is the budget. Being able to operate with what is already in place looks tough – and, budgets only go so far.

“Issues including academic requirements, high school co-op, and various types of scheduling difficulties sometimes make it tough on students to stay enrolled in career and technical education programs. These issues have an effect on what and how long students can take programs at the ATC. Helping students become employable has always been a major goal in career and technical education, but getting and keeping the student is becoming more difficult. In spite of the obstacles, Kentucky Tech continues to make a difference in the lives of many students and we have a direct impact on keeping them in school.”



*(l to r): West, Alford, and John Hodge,
retired KY Tech-Harrison Co. ATC principal.*

***Doug West
KY Tech-Madison Co. ATC principal:***

***“It has been my pleasure to
know Jim Alford as a friend, mentor,
and true gentleman.***

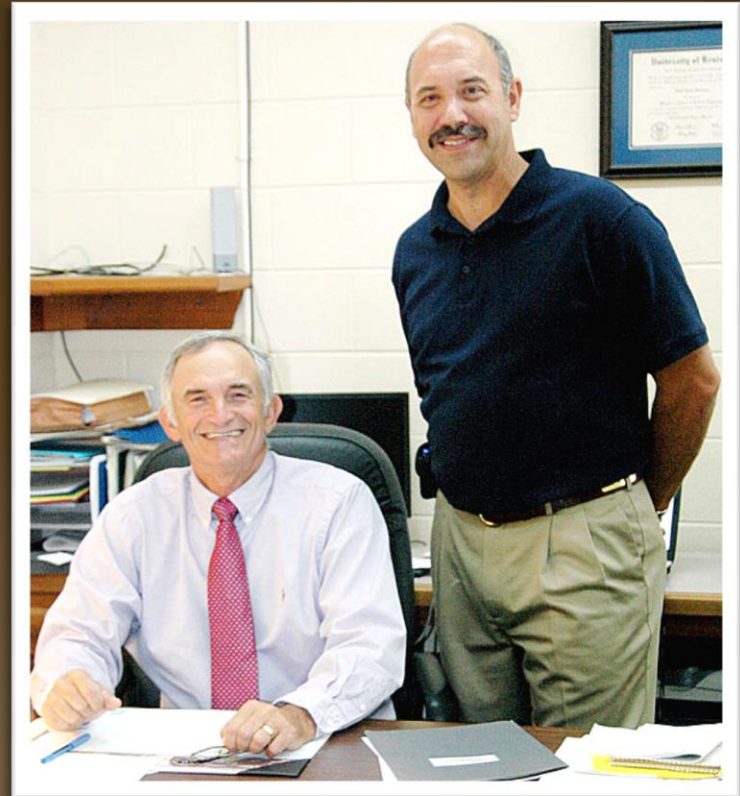
***“When I became a principal,
he was there when I needed help.
That in itself is priceless. It’s part
of his good nature and ability to
work together as a team to pass
along lessons learned. I can’t
thank him enough for his time,
guidance and being a ‘go to’ person.***

***“As a colleague and friend, I
wish him the best in his
retirement.”***

David Horseman
Garrard County ATC principal:

“Jim was a colleague and mentor across the hall from me when I first began my career as an electrical technology instructor. We often talked about how maybe someday he would become principal. He accomplished his goals and walks into retirement knowing he made a difference.

“Jim is a great friend and will be missed by everyone at our school and all of those he touched over the past 33 years. That’s really what it’s all about – making a difference in the lives of people. All of us in the KY Tech school district raise up to that challenge every day. Jim Alford hit the mark and I am honored to keep the tradition moving in the right direction.”



**Colleague and friend David Horseman
replaces Alford as new
KY Tech-Garrard County ATC principal**

Alford:

“As a teacher and principal, I have always said to students - Some of you will find and make a career here, some of you will not. And, that is okay. But, I guarantee if you apply yourselves, you will somehow use what you have learned somewhere down the road.

“Growing up within the system has been great. However, I believe that when you are 22, you really don’t give a lot of thought about retirement. It’s down the road. But time moves on and eventually you have 5, 10, 20, and then 27 years of experience in the system. You look back and see that your kids are grown and begin asking yourself - what’s going on here? Then all of a sudden you look up and have 33 years. With grown children, you now have grandkids. It really is a journey, but you are focused on making a difference in the lives of students and lose track of the time.

“I have been blessed with an opportunity to work with quality people throughout my career. After 33 years, 15 of which I have served as principal, I leave another great school and staff. Career and technical education has been good to me. As far as my next career, well, I think I may go to work for some of our former students. We all have them out there and because of their skills, many are making more money than we did as teachers and administrators. It really is technical education and skills training for life.”



Alford Clan

(l to r): Stephanie Wilson, Ryan Wilson, Alford, Laurie Alford, Rankin Frasier, Stacia Alford, Sara Police, Joseph Police, and Joey Police (grandson). Not pictured: JulieAnn Rose, granddaughter.

Editor's Note:

What a great career – especially since you turned out to be an outstanding example of who we are and what we can actually accomplish through our system. KUDOS to you – you got it right. What a wonderful balance of technical education and skills training, postsecondary education, family, and career.

Live well and continue putting the skills you learned in high school to work.



Photo submitted by Sara Police.

Good News Story #329

August 13, 2010

By: Fran Dundon

**Office of Career and Technical Education
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet**